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# Response to Sakamoto

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# Response

Serap Mahmatli

## I. Introduction

Since the implosions of the socialist bloc, everyone has asked the same question: What is next? In the early days following the collapse, it seemed as if a peaceful world based on the victory of the capitalist West was going to emerge. Soon after, however, with the ethnic and regional conflicts breaking out, what had been called the “new world order” is being renamed the “new world disorder”! Now the question is: Will there be a transformation for a democratic world order, as Professor Sakamoto asks; or will it be just the opposite, and we will fail?

In general, I agree with most of Professor Sakamoto’s points and his historical analysis. The critical global problematiques conceptualized by him as (a) peace/disparity, (b) development/democracy, (c) human rights/culture/population, and (d) environment/democracy all appear as the major problems of today’s world. Furthermore, I think Professor Sakamoto makes a very important point by showing the incongruity between the global character of the problematiques and the national character of the agents who are supposed to deal with them.

I also concur with the four fundamental developments defined by Professor Sakamoto — the unipolar world military order, the single capitalist global market, the universalization of nationalism, and the globalization of democracy as the salient features of the post–Cold War period. However, I would like to add a few more points to this picture. Along with these developments, I also see a unipolar world cultural order and unipolar world information system — a flow of values and information from the center to the periphery.

With Professor Sakamoto’s analysis as a backdrop, I will confine my remarks to how some of these issues, especially globalization, are playing out in Turkey.

## **II. Turkey and Globalization**

As a Turkish journalist, I feel that we are at the very center of the clash between national identity and globalism. Actually, being a country situated at the crossroads of Asia, Europe, the Balkans, and the Middle East, we have always had a problem of identity. It is a place where not only the geography of the East and West meet but also the minds and mentalities; sometimes they compromise, sometimes they conflict.

The collapse of the Soviet Union as a whole had a very special influence in Turkey in addition to the issues and discussions it raised on a global scale. This drastic event has caused us to rediscover our history, redefine our Turkish identity, and reformulate our traditional international position and role.

As is known, Turkey is a Muslim society and 99 percent of the population is Muslim. Professor Bernard Lewis states that Turkey is the only democratic and secular Islamic state among the fifty-one members of the International Islamic Conference. I feel Turkey is a special case and a unique model that demonstrates the failures and successes of an Islamic community's attempt to adopt modernist values.

If Turkey has responded positively to the question of compatibility of Islam and democracy, the country is still, according to Samuel Huntington, an important actor in a possible clash between Christian Euro-American culture and Islam in the twenty-first century. Contrary to Huntington, however, I believe Turkey's role in such an eventuality is not predetermined. We all know that a clash between Islam and Christianity is not something new; for a very long time, the Turks have been the sword of Islam against the West, especially during the reign of the Ottoman Empire.

But it is also a fact that the bureaucratic and military elite of Turkey, who founded the Republic of Turkey in 1923 under the leadership of Kemal Atatürk on the debris of the Ottoman Empire, made a very deliberate choice for Westernization and westward political orientation. In the new republic, the Ottoman heritage and history were almost completely rejected; and thorough social, political, and economic Westernization reforms were immediately adopted. In this sense, the Turkish road to Westernization constitutes a unique example within the entire

Islamic community. The reason was simple. The West was obviously becoming more and more powerful; consequently, to regain the glory days of the past, Turkey had to adopt Western ways. Basically, the reforms have been quite successful, and Turkey has made great strides, relative to its condition and to other Islamic nations.

During the Cold War period, the young Republic of Turkey became an ally of the West against communism and the USSR, with whom she shared a border. As a member of NATO, Turkey followed a very cautious, modest, Western-oriented foreign policy. Being a “late-starter” in modernization, Turkey relied heavily upon the state to create an entrepreneurial industrial class. This was not smooth. The military intervened three times.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the import substituting and protective Turkish economy had to go through a process of structural change to become a more liberalized market economy. To a certain extent, this was a successful change; Turkey had the highest rate of growth in recent years among the OECD countries. But, in return, the social and political cost has been very high—a cost that will continue to be paid for some time.

With the full penetration of the capitalist world market economy, our own traditional social and economic values are being seriously damaged. The rich are becoming richer and highly integrated into the new global economy while the poor get poorer and the large middle class, the foundation of the republican values, has shrunk.

During this period, what used to be a slow flow of migration from rural to urban areas became a flood. The migrants came with values and beliefs that the urban culture was too weak and disorganized to accommodate. As a result, traditional values and severe economic impoverishment among many in urbanized Turkey have pushed political attitudes in a conservative and alarmingly reactionary direction.

As a reflection of these circumstances, Turkey held local elections in March of 1994. The results were shocking. The Islamic fundamentalist Welfare Party, for the first time in modern history, won in Istanbul and the capital city of Ankara, the symbols of secularism. Moreover, the fundamentalists also took most of the inland cities, which had been negatively affected by the recent liberal economic changes.

Finally, a year prior to these elections there was an ugly episode that signaled the coming of great internal tension in Turkey. In a central Anatolian town that once had a very progressive role in the foundation of the republic, fundamentalists announced their presence by burning to the ground a hotel housing visiting intellectuals. Thirty-seven of them lost their lives. At the moment, many are watching with apprehension the actions of the fundamentalists in power, hoping they will be replaced through democratic action. The stakes are high in Turkey and the central questions include: Who will win — the globalized elites or the marginalized masses? Could there be a middle-of-the-road solution based on a just, democratic, and secular state in a modern society? What about issues of economic fairness and social justice?

While all of this was taking place inside Turkey—the symptoms of a new world disorder—the Bosnian and Armenian/Azerbaijani conflicts broke out. Both were presented as religious wars, and the powerful West did nothing to stop the slaughtering of Muslims. These international developments reinforced the claims of the nonsecular groups. In addition to these events, the collapse of the Soviet Union created a new situation — the liberation of the Turkic republics of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. This was good news in Turkey. Suddenly, there appeared a Turkish existence from the Balkans to China. In the wake of this development, a new debate about Turkey's role in the region and the new world has commenced. Among the ideas on the front page is the creation of a pan-Turkic zone with a sense of its own fate and no longer an adjunct to others.

### **III. Conclusion**

I agree with Professor Sakamoto on the need to restructure the United Nations. As a member of the developing world, I believe the potential of the new epoch can be captured only if multiculturalism becomes the defining feature of transnational life and institutions. I have to say that, in Turkey, after seventy years of conscious modernization, we are dismayed by vulgar and orientalist stereotypical questions such as: Do women still wear veils in Turkey? Do men marry four women? I must also add that,

although we tried hard, neither Western governments nor Western people see us as a part of an evolving modern world; instead, they dismiss us as an alien culture good only for economic exploitation and military alliance. I am not an Islamic fundamentalist, rather the very product of the Westernization of my country. However, I have resentments toward the West that coincide with the Islamic fundamentalist criticism of the West.

Let me end by saying a few words about the future relations between the Islamic and Christian worlds. It is crucial to resist demonization of each other. The responsibility for this, in my opinion, lies primarily with the people of both civilizations and the media. So far, there is a great deal of misrepresentation and sheer ignorance on both sides. I feel very uncomfortable with the media coverage of Islam in the U.S. which is caricatured by the repetitive images of dark-bearded and deranged militants, women in veils, and an inert mass of illiterate and backward peoples. There is no gainsaying that these elements form a part of reality, but they do not do justice to a more complex history or contemporary life. Islam has its own high culture, conception of human rights, equality of sexes, and a very deep humanistic approach. Discovering the virtues that great civilizations of the world share and becoming alive to them, while minimizing the divisive, are key to envisaging a new world order worthy of global civic life.